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A 96-year-old World War II veteran got a special treat last Thursday morning: a ride in an antique open-cockpit biplane at the Maryland Airport.

Maybelle Campbell, who served as a private first class in the U.S. Army in England during the war, is a resident of Spring Hills Mount Vernon, an assisted living facility in Alexandria, Va. When she heard that the plane would be in the area offering free rides to senior veterans, she immediately volunteered to go.



“It’s something different,” Campbell told the Maryland Independent. “It’s been quite a while since I flew.”

Strapped snugly into the open cockpit and wearing a cloth helmet, Campbell took off from the Maryland Airport into bright, clear Thursday morning skies and spent several minutes enjoying the landscape with no window blocking her view.

“The pilot said, ‘look over here’ and ‘look over there,’” Campbell said. “I could see everything. It was nice.”

The airplane, a Boeing Stearman PT-17 Kaydet, is one of three operated by the Ageless Aviation Dreams Foundation. The organization travels the country offering free flights to seniors and military veterans, particularly those who are living in long-term care communities. Pilots volunteer their time with the foundation to operate the aircraft, usually flying out of small regional airports.

The flight was originally scheduled to take place earlier in the week at Hyde Field in Clinton, but had to be canceled due to weather.

“They called us at the last minute, and I said, ‘Yes, of course, we’d love to have you out here,’” said Tammy Potter, co-owner of the Maryland Airport. “I’ve been here 10 years and we haven’t had anything like this.”

After the flight, pilot Chris Culp asked Campbell for a hug and signed a baseball cap for her. Darren Hafner, a pilot and musician who recently joined the foundation, picked up a guitar and played folk tunes for Campbell while she waited for her friend Joyce Hall to take a ride of her own.

Spring Hills Mount Vernon had reached out to the Ageless Aviation Dreams Foundation to ask if they could take Campbell for a flight the next time they were passing through the area, said Jeff Burroughs, the owner of SportCuts Haircuts, a major sponsor of the foundation.

“It took us a couple of days to make it happen,” Burroughs said.

“They’re still dreaming about what they did when they were young,” Burroughs said of veterans like Campbell. “This program is about putting a smile on people’s faces.”

After the flight, Campbell said that it reminded her of a journey she took in an airplane during World War II.

“I remember them telling me jokes on the plane,” Campbell said with a chuckle.

“I enjoyed it,” she said. Asked if she would do it again next year, though, she smiled and shook her head.

“That was enough,” she said.